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VAGABOND VERSES

BY

HENRY AUSTIN.

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BOSTON:
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[My thanks are due to some of the editors of the publications here listed for kind, fraternal courtesies connected with the production of this little book.—HENRY AUSTIN.]

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DEDICATION.

These music-children I have called together
To give them all a father's equal kiss,
Though some were born 'neath hedges in rough weather
And some in palaces of silent bliss.

The rain of tears — the stain of wine — is on them;
Their best and truest pale beside my dream;
But, lady mine, let fall thine eyes upon them
And then, like stars, the very worst shall seem.

For thou hast brought me long, long days of joyance,
Giving each glorious hour a lingering thrill;
And thou, through nights of failure and annoyance,
Of doubt and pain, hast pointed upward still.

So, lady mine, this book of rhymes I bring thee,
A gift which from the taking gaineth grace;
E'en as all beauty in the songs I sing thee
Is but thy soul's bright shadow — is thy face.

FIRST LOVE.

Years ago, on tender tiptoe, she would steal into my chamber,
Softer than a song at sea that dies upon the deep;
Then would bend and plant a flower of love upon my lips in slumber,
Seeming, like a dream, half true when I was half asleep.

And at times as I lay watching for the fairies I believed in,
If I heard her footfalls, how I slyly would pretend
I was fast asleep, and listen to her bosom heaving o'er me,
Like far music with whose echoes faintest perfumes blend!

Years and years ago, how lovely! she would steal into my chamber;
Then would kneel and pray for me beside my trundle-bed,
And I used to think the golden stars were eyes of happy angels,
Bending smiles of bright approval on her golden head.

Years and years ago my first love often stole into my chamber,
And how many a flower of love her warm lips planted then!
But on one dark night — a shadow of the Night that is eternal —
From my chamber slow she went, and never came again.

Often since those nights of childhood I've been crowned
with thorns and roses;
Many falls have made me humble, some successes proud;
I have had the love of maiden, felt the glorious thrill of
friendship,
Drunk the poet-wine of nature under sun and cloud.

And yet now, within the twilight, as I think of all the
raptures,
All that have been mine, or may be in the future's keep,
Sure, ah! sadly sure, it seemeth, all together they weigh
nothing
To one light kiss from my mother on my make-believe
asleep.

DEA PASSU.

Upon the sumptuous summer of my days,
The splendid August of my vital year,
Thou camest, gently as a breeze that plays
With flowers of morning in such tender ways
That from no petal falls a dewy tear;
Yet brightly, as the mock tears disappear
From flowers' glad eyes when dies the flower-like Dawn,
Thou camest, and Youth's golden atmosphere
Took on a purple splendor, doubtless drawn
Out of the truth-wells of thy violet eyes;
And swiftly, too, thou camest — in no guise
Of liking that to friendship warmed and then
Burned into passion after fashion of men —
For thou wert perfect at the first surprise.

HAUNTED.

Within this empty house
Now sports the furtive mouse
Where late my darling played
Light as a shade.

Within this lonely room
Ah! how she used to bloom,
Singing in golden hours
Of love and flowers!

Within this bed she lay;
Ah me! into what day—
What daylight of delight—
She turned the night!

Within this heart she crowned
Passion with peace profound,
Making Death's shadow seem
Less than a dream.

Within this soul she sleeps:
She is not dead: but keeps
Silence, with marble smile,
A little while.

Within this life there is
Much cloud of mysteries:
But through the darkest night
Her star shines bright.

Within this universe
Pain is Perfection's nurse;
Yet Faith her way can find—
Not always blind.

Within this heaven of Love,
This soul that looks above,
This heart that doth not break,
She sleeps—to wake.

UNE FLEUR DU MAL.

She found a flower by the wayside —
  A wonderful, white flower;
  But evil was the hour
She lifted it from the wayside
  And brought it to her bower.

For there it grew gigantic,
  A coiling colonnade
  Like to the banyan's shade;
And, like a snake gigantic,
  Its tendrils round her played.

And its blossoms so white — ah! cruel —
  To a frosty silver turned
  And their quivering edges burned
From that to a crimson as cruel
  As ever 'mid flames discerned.

And it breathed a poisonous odor
  Which was hot by fits and starts;
  Then cold, as the icy darts
That Winter throws — an odor
  Which entered her heart of hearts.

So the Woman lay dead, or dreamed it;
  And that Flower of frost and fire
  Became her funeral pyre;
Poor Heart, who Love had dreamed it,
  When it only was Desire!

SEPTEMBER.

Summer is dead, they say: my Queen is dead:
So passeth all the glory of the earth:
Yet, though gray clouds are marshalling overhead,
Still lives the echo of my fair Queen's mirth;
And though her reign be ended, her bright realm
Remaineth yet unravaged, yet unchanged —
Hardly one red leaf on the graceful elm —
And see! one poppy lingers unestranged
Of pristine splendor, while the wayside sod
Bears witness that the new King yet is mild,
That Autumn, mindful he is Summer's child,
Rules with remembrance of her golden rod.

They say, Summer is dead, but it is hard
For me to feel my Queen is really dead,
And when I pause where green fields yet are starred
With lavish little dollarets of gold,
Wealthy with these, I raise a rebel head
Against the tyrant clouds threatful of cold
And cry: "O Heart, my Summer lives and reigns.
She hath but hid a moment that our gains
By pains might be superbly multiplied
Unto perfection; yea, she doth but hide
And soon will forth again, more lovely than a bride."

Yea, for awhile I cannot make her dead:
The glamour of her glory gathereth
A subtler charm from her supposéd death;
'Tis not her ghost, but her sweet self who saith
This perfumed benediction that hath spread,
Sudden, o'er all things in this valley fair:
Yea, I still see the shadow of her hair

Golden in yonder covert: she is there
Beyond a peradventure, and once more,
With loveliness more lovely than before,
Yon tree shall glimpse to me her Dryad face
Or I shall see her rise with Naiad grace
There, where that sprite with wings of woven wind,
That domineering dragon-fly, now gads
With gossip rushes near those lily-pads
In the still stream — or there, where tints of Ind
'Mid jungled banks like many a lurking gleam
Of her sweet laughter to my vision seem:
And cardinal flowers, brave priests with tongues of fire,
Denounce the dulness of the umbraged stream
Whose amber partly mirrors Heaven — indeed,
E'en like our hearts where many a vain desire
Broods o'er the bright brim like a river-weed;
Yes, there she lurks, she lives, I will not doubt
Till the last torch of the last weed burn out
And then, within my heart, for all she gave,
My Queen, my Summer, still shall live and reign:
Crowned for perfection with a thorny pain,
Still shall she live, and live, and have no grave.

THE HEART'S ARITHMETIC.

Though like the sacred lights above
May shine the poet's golden name,
One little hour of simple love
Outweighs a million years of fame.

BOHEMIAN DAYS.

Ah, Max! I miss the glory of that garret
  Which oft we looked at through a purple haze,
Like a spice-island in a sea of claret,
  When merry midnights crowned the dear, dead days.

The low-browed walls with gaudy playbills papered
  That mocked the jolly sun's astonished rays;
The blithesome birds that round their cages capered
  And sang so sweetly in the dear, dead days.

The old machine at which my Love sat sewing
  And humming soft my favorite, Scottish lays
Till, from her bosom, the full tune came flowing
  And the birds listened in the dear, dead days.

The dingy desk whereon I wrote wild stories
  For trashy prints, or cribbed Parisian plays,
Dreaming sometimes of true, poetic glories —
  Butterfly children of the dear, dead days.

The ancient fiddle that you used to fondle,
  Dear Max, and make us glad in sudden ways
With clamorous roundelay and amorous rondel: —
  Ah! you had genius in the dear, dead days.

And oh! that shaky table where so neatly
  My Love, for table-cloth, the paper lays;
Then, while I read the news, you warble sweetly
  A grace for dinner in the dear, dead days.

Such trills — such tremolos to prelude a dinner —
  Such grace-notes — tricks a tender tenor plays!
Yes, life was golden; yes, this poor bread-winner,
  My pen, was potent in the dear, dead days.

How fair these things arise to memory's vision!
But ah! the sun departs, the shadow stays;
Yet lingers something exquisite, elysian,
In the strange pathos of the dear, dead days.

I note these trifles through a misty brightness,
Perchance the brightness of the tear they raise;
And my heart leaps, yet lingers in its lightness,
Like her low laughter in the dear, dead days.

Like her — how soft and musical in motion
With deep, dark eyes that blind the diamond's blaze!
How sweet she was and worthy of devotion
From any poet of the dear, dead days!

Musing sometimes before mine easel olden,
I paint the fancy-work that never pays,
Auroral gleams of roses turning golden,
My dreams of color, in the dear, dead days.

Across my tints her graceful shadow stealeth;
I leave my work a little while to gaze
On the new charms which every step revealeth —
Ah! vital music of my dear, dead days.

She stands beside me with the sun's caresses
On the red gold that down her bosom strays;
O sunset kisses upon auburn tresses,
Ye seemed God's blessing on the dear, dead days.

She stands beside me — Nay, she leaned upon me
A cheek that blushed e'en at my lightest praise;
But the great crown of light her eyes put on me
Is lost 'mid shadows of the dear, dead days!

For, now, the lonely night around me darkens,
And silence my sad spirit softly sways
Till, with all discord hushed, it humbly hearkens
For faintest echoes of those dear, dead days.

* * * * * * * * *

Ah! Max, lost friend, if then this heart had broken
In one vast wave of sorrowful amaze,
Over my grave you would have placed a token
Of our fair friendship in the dear, dead days.

But now your face with ledger-lines is wrinkled;
The curse of gold upon you heavily weighs;
Like coppers are the splendid eyes that twinkled
With happiest humors in the dear, dead days.

Ah! Max, your change would be sufficient sorrow
But that a deeper grief my soul dismays:
The heavy doubt if Death will have a morrow
And I my darling of the dear, dead days.

O Sacred Love! How couldst thou fade so quickly
Like a fair fruit-tree ere its top displays
One blossom! Ah! the rain-drops fell too thickly
In our young garden in the dear, dead days.

O Love, sweet Love, my first, last, only treasure,
Wilt thou not send me ere my faith decays
One single smile that I beyond the azure
May see a heavenly dawn for all our dear, dead days?

STANZAS FOR MUSIC.

I.

The sunset grand along the strand
  Gives the green waves a golden glow —
And alone I stand, in a far, far land,
  Watching the years between us flow —
Watching the years, the bitter years,
  Like floods of tears
    Between us flow.

II.

The sunset fades amid the shades
  Over the waves that moan so low:
The sunset dies — but o'er the skies
  Its great slow ghost now seems to go —
And alone I stand, in a far, far land,
  Watching the years between us flow —
Watching the years, the bitter years,
  Like floods of tears
    Between us flow.

III.

The night, like death, without a breath,
  Falls on the ocean, still and slow:
Night comes to me, but o'er the sea,
  Lady, for thee the day doth glow;
And so, my love, I look above,
  Dreaming the Heaven we yet may know,
Though alone I stand, in a far, far land,
  Watching the years between us flow —
Watching the years, the bitter years,
  Like floods of tears
    Between us flow.

THE BLUEBIRD.

"On his breast the earth: on his wings and back the sky."
THOREAU.

To the window of my garret
Came a bluebird yester morn,
And I fancied for a moment
'Twas the soul of Spring, newborn;
But I heard thy wind, October,
Sighing like a ghost forlorn;
And the gray clouds, full of menace,
Frowned the dancing leaves to scorn;
And the bluebird flew away:

Flew away ere I could open
Unto such a heavenly guest
That old window of my garret
Near to which, perhaps, a nest
Full of bluebirds once was hidden,—
So, before his southern quest,
He had paused for one more visit
Near the place he loved the best,
The old nest where he was born:

Yes, was born. There is a hollow
In the apple-tree close by;
And the bluebird (who doth carry
On his back and wings the sky,
And upon his breast the brown earth
Of the Spring-time soft and shy),
Trusteth often to things hollow —
Precious hopes — as you and I
Oft have done and may again.

May again? Nay, will do always,
Let us pray, since far more wise
Is the habit of believing
Than the wisdom cynics prize:
Rather let us be like bluebirds
Who, although the brown earth tries
Up their breasts to spread its color,
Carry on their wings the skies —
But my bluebird flew away:

Flew away, and then this other
Fancy came: how oft, indeed,
Heavenly guests unsought might seek us
In our grayest days of need,
If we only to the music
Of their coming wings gave heed!
But they find our garret windows
Closed, too oft — and so they speed,
Like my bluebird, far away!

A SIGH.

Just for one day if you and I, love,
Could be together as free as air
Under the smile of a tropic sky, love,
Oh! what perfumes the breeze would bring to us!
Ah! what music the birds would sing to us! —
Till day departing would linger there
And over our parting softly throw
Many a rosebud of sunset glow;
Ah! love, sweet love, if it could be so!

OEDIPUS.

STROPHE.

I have lived many lives in many lands
And much of evil hath my nature stained,
But I have felt since touching of thine hands
That evil is not in my soul engrained.

The dust and sweat of the world's tournament
Are on me, and the battle is not done,
Because the fiery spirit must have vent
Till the night cometh or the prize be won.

What night? Ah me! The double night of Death
Which clouds and shadows Love's serenest noon:
What prize? Is any worthy so much breath
As would suffice on thy sweet lips to swoon?

Is life worth living? I have heard thee ask
And then reply to silence with a sigh:
But I who in thy smiles have learned to bask
Have thus unlearned my old desire to die.

ANTISTROPHE.

Life is worth living. I, who tropic-born
Have chased its butterflies from boyhood's morn;
Who, early lost in Folly's flowery maze,
Have lowered my nature in a million ways.
Now lift it up and lay it on the shrine
Of a high passion, high and pure as thine;

A passion warm as sunlight, yet as tender,
As is the maiden moon's midsummer splendor,
When the stars tremble in the melting skies,
Like tears of happiness in angels' eyes—
Like tears of happiness! O Love, if I
For man do aught of good that shall not die,
If I, despite my frequent fall and sin,
Make the world better for my having been
And go down calmly to an honored end;
'Twill be, O Love, because thou didst descend
Upon me, as of old the soft, swift dove,
Bringing to Life's dark ark the olive-branch of Love.

THAT DAY.

All things confessed thy nearness. Breeze to brook
Whispered my bliss, as though 'twere Nature's gain:
The brook that secret to the river took
With swifter joy: the river to the main
Unrolled the swelling mystery in a strain
Of solemn sweetness, and on many a sea,
That day, the lone ships rode more easily,
Since Ocean's bosom heaved in sympathy
With mutual music born of thee and me:
That day, too, many a mated bird proclaimed
Thy coming, but what seemed to speak thee most
Was one dark rose, whose lovely, fragrant ghost
Floated above the garden's dying host—
Just as the sky with sudden sunset flamed.

SHADOWS.

I.

He — Why do you wake, O woman, to-night,
Having slept so many years?
Why do you start from your grave in my heart —
O woman of many tears?

II.

She — I have come to learn
If your lips yet burn
With the kisses I kindled there,
Or whether the grace
Of a living face
Must render the dead less fair.

III.

He — But you do not exist,
O woman I kissed
In the twilights of Long Ago;
You are only dust,
Or, if soul, I trust
You are far above
The jealousied love
Of the dream of this life below.

IV.

She — Has it come to this
That a dead girl's kiss
Is outlived by the lips of the quick?
Are the words you hear
With your spirit's ear
Not mine — but a curious trick
By your memory played
On your fancy — the shade

Of a shadow, the dream of a dream?
O God! my lover in days of yore,
Do you verily count me as one no more,
Do you deem that these tears but seem?

V.

He — This is merely dew
On my brow that lies —
Not tears from you —
For I buried you twice,
Once, deep down in a garden of spice
And once in a cavern of sobs and sighs
Deeper still, in the heart's great grave,
With hopes, ambitions and noble things —
Aspirant angels that lost their wings —
Then why should you quit that crimson cave
Where the best of my life is hidden away,
Like an insect bright
In a chrysalid gray;
Till the falling of the final night
Or the dawning of the endless day?

SOUTHWARD HO!

The dark and solemn pines
Beside my native sea
That moan in minor key,
Like a sad poet's lines,
Are not the friends for me;
For trees of fragrant flower
And golden-globéd fruit
With graceful boughs invite
My Fancy to alight
And far from Pain's pursuit
To build her rightful bower.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

I heard Love's voice in Spring,
When birds were on the wing,
  Mating and softly singing,
And oh! how sweet the thing
Love whispered in the Spring,
  When all the woods were ringing!

In Summer, too, I heard
Sweeter than any bird
  Love's lingering voice grow firmer,
E'en as the music grand
The sea sings to the land
  With long and languorous murmur.

In Autumn, then, the tone
Of Love had rounder grown,
  A magic cirque of motion—
As if the ancient hills
With all their rollick rills
  Would overbrim the ocean.

But Winter comes and oh!
Love's lilting voice falls low—
  A ghostly tone and hollow!
Long have the birds been flown
And Love, now left alone,
  What can he do but follow?

Yet ah! what southern land,
By favoring breezes fanned,
  Invites Love for a season?
Nay, nay, Love hath no wings
And what Life's winter brings
  For Love to shun were treason.

All things may pass away,
Like birds that pipe in May
  And vanish in September,
But Love comes here to stay
And though our heads grow gray,
  Our hearts have no December.

So, Soul of mine, once more
I pledge thee as of yore;
  But now with deeper reason;
For I have learned this truth,
In Age, as well as Youth,
  Love's never out of season.

ONENESS.

I thank thee, dearest, for the pain
  Thy life has brought to me;
For to my spirit all is gain
  That I can share with thee.

THE DIFFERENCE.

In Persia there lived a poet
  Who fell in love with a Rose —
Poor child of odor and color
  That soon to the dark earth goes.

In England was born a singer
  Who aimed his heart at a star —
A splendor sublime beyond him,
  Eternally fair and far.

Then somewhere happened another
  Who, loving a homely life,
Took a gentle and graceful woman
  For his muse, as well as wife.

And truly he found about her
  A beauty no time could dim:
Her face was a rose of rapture:
  Her soul was a star to him.

The flower of the Persian's passion
  Was pleasure and lust of days:
The light of the Saxon's vision
  Was fame and popular praise:

The goal that they gained was golden,
  But I wonder if they found,
When summing life up at its sunset,
  That the end had the labor crowned.

And I fancy the household rhymer,
  Though unknown he sank to rest
On the breast of our common Mother
  Was the happiest, wisest, best.

IMPROMPTU.

Sometimes, when through merriest music
  That should stir the soul to sing,
Steals a strain of over-sweetness,
  As if Joy had snapt a string,
Memory seemeth like some sunset
  Where Love waves a cloudy wing
And the heart at its own echo
  Trembles like a guilty thing.

Was she fair — that girl you dream of?
  Was she fair and overfond?
Hath she crossed the long, dark river
  To the Bower of Dreams beyond?
Was she fairer than the fairest
  Who now wields the wondrous wand
Of that mighty, mad magician,
  To whose spell all hearts respond?

Then, my friend, seek not to banish
  Such a gentle-meaning ghost;
For no star shines half so certain
  In the calm, eternal host,
As the star of hope that beckons
  Ever to that other coast,
Where those souls shall sing the sweetest
  Who, on earth, have loved the most.

SONG.

When the sun is in the west
And the bird is on her nest
And the wind is at rest
On the sea;
Right above the harbor bar
Bright as love outshines a star
And I know my little ship is coming back to me.

Though the sky had many a cloud
When her outward way she plowed,
And the wind wept aloud
On the sea,
Yet before that day was done,
With the last look of the sun
Rose a rainbow for a sign, a divine sign, to me.

So I'm sure that up the bay
I shall see my ship some day,
Like a bird flying gay
To its tree;
And around her prow the spray
Making rainbows all the way,
Will sing treble to a song of treble joy for me.

A PARABLE.

Said the Meadow to the Mountain
"You are much too high;
People cannot dwell upon you;
They would freeze and die."

Said the Mountain to the Meadow,
With a smile of lofty scorn:
"Those who must on you take shelter
Best had ne'er been born.
Finer far the clouds that crown me
Than the mists that rise from you!
Healthier far my snowy breezes
Than your feverous dew!"

Then the Sun who loveth all things
Laughed a broad, bland laugh of light,
And his laughter's golden echo,
Rolling down the heavenly height,
Flooded, with a vital music
And a summery delight,
Both the Mountain and the Meadow
So they were united quite,
And their finite self-importance
Vapored vaguely out of sight.

EN RAPPORT.

Though never swift caresses or slow kisses
  May tune our veins to Passion's music deep;
Though never, never, in a bower of blisses
  May we make Life more beautiful than Sleep;
Though 'tween us twain may pass no tender token,
  Beyond some slight, shy pressure of the hand;
Though never word of sweetness may be spoken,
    Yet you will understand —
      Yes, you will understand.

And if, when Life's long winter shall be over,
  Our weary bodies near each other rest,
May we not dream of Love beneath the clover,
  The tender clover of Earth's mother-breast?
Or if in some remote and radiant regions
  Our souls should kiss; then wander hand in hand
Far from the wondering gaze of angel legions —
    Why, God will understand —
      Yes, He will understand.

THE CHICKADEE.

When trees stand mute with bare, protesting arms
Against the grayness of November skies,
Wherein the menace of a snow-storm lies;
When bushes all have lost their mellow charms —
Save the witch-hazel whose dim stars appear,
In quaintest mockery of its fabled powers,
Like pallid ghosts of golden summer hours:
When winds are sighing for the dying year;
When not a bird that mated in the Spring's
Elusive Eden dares to linger near,
Even to sing farewell, but spread his wings
And, aiming South, shoots off with sudden fear
Of the cold clouds foreshadowing snows to be —
Then long and strong of song is heard the Chickadee.

MEETING.

In a strange Southern city that lies bound
Under the crush and ever-threatening weight
Of the great Sire of Waters — calm as fate,
Yet joyous, too, with ceaseless roses crowned,
And robed of orange blooms from May to May,
In that strange Southern city where to dwell
Means to feel deepest the most luring spell
Of this one certain life, one certain day —
A day that hath in memory's heaven been set
Supreme 'gainst every future trick of chance —
Two souls, though twin, like utter strangers met:
Like utter strangers? No! There was a glance,
Just as they parted, and to them 'twas plain
That sometime, somewhere, they should meet again.

IN MASSACHUSETTS

My birthday, and the snow falls fast
  On this dear land where I was born:
Yet 'spite the February blast,
    This very morn
Some early robins whistled clear
A funeral march for Winter's bier.

And, fluttering in the windy flaw
  Just as the day began to break,
Was it a bluebird that I saw,
    Or but a flake
Of springtime skies, whose lucent blue
Lets many a spirit-smile come through?

But the snow falls and, as with cold
  Grave-garments, folds my birthday round;
And where's the bird so blithe and bold
    With merry sound
Will fight this silence falling still
On my heart, as on vale and hill?

No birds cry "comrade" to my call,
  But, safely hidden in the screen
Of hemlocks dense or chink of wall,
    They sleep serene;
Tho', in the pauses of the snow,
Hark! a vast wind begins to blow.

"Hurrah for Winter," roars the Storm,
"Long live King Winter in the land,
With myriad white slaves to form,
At his command,
A solid front and hold at bay
The flower-crowned Queen whose name is May."

Well roared, O Storm! but in my soul
Thy brag a gay defiance wakes,
And glowing as a Christmas coal,
My spirit takes
The silver shadow of unborn May
Close, closer to itself, this day.

For lo! I see — not far away,
Beyond where March and April fight
For freedom from King Winter's sway —
A strange delight,
And every hill a-dancing seems
With liberated flowers and streams.

And hark! I hear a triumph blown
From purple trumpets which to men
Are by the name of roses known,
But to my ken
Are kisses, of true lovers earned,
By May to trumps of perfume turned.

And hark again! O'er vale and hill
A slow, sweet zephyr steals its way.
No more a silence white and chill
On a gray day
Is falling, falling, but the long,
Strong sun begins and sets with song.

O strange and many-visaged year,
I thank my stars that I was born
In this dear land, by some thought drear;
Nor do I mourn
Because my birthdays chance to be
From Winter's empery not free.

Since 'twixt the winter and the spring
My spirit, set by kindly stars,
Fellows with every struggling thing,
Beating life's bars,
And feels intenser, every year,
Man's triumph typed by springtime here.

And I thank God that I was born
In this dear land, this noble State,
Whose voice, from Lexington's red morn,
Commanding Fate,
Has ever thundered in the van
For the true Brotherhood of Man.

Then fall as thick as thoughts, ye snows,
And shout, proud Storm, upon the hills!
A sweeter peace than monarch knows
My bosom fills;
A prouder joy expands my brain,
In Massachusetts born again.

FOR THE SILENT LOVER.

O Rose of Brightness, Lily of Whiteness,
Breeze of Lightness, blow!
For with Laughter sweet of dancing Feet
The Brooks to the River flow
And the Rivers flashing, to Ocean dashing,
With a swelling Triumph go.

Laugh up, ye Flowers,
Above all Words
To the golden Hours
And with mating Powers
Laugh out, ye Birds,
As ye build your Bowers!
And from Orchard open or Forest-cover
Sing, O sing, for the Silent Lover—
For the Silent Lover who hath not broken
Love's deepening Spell by Word or Token;
But waits at the Gates of Life's Completeness,
Though the shining Hour be shod with Fleetness,
Like a flying Flower—a Wreck of Sweetness:
Like a flying Flower some spirit of Cloud,
Some Wind of Destiny, low, not loud,
Drives up and down in a fragrant Whirl,
Like the Ghost of a Kiss from the Lips of a Girl—
A Girl whose Loveliness makes the Spring
Seem a real, incarnate Thing
In Glory of whom the Birds must sing
And the Flowers must bloom; so the Silent Lover
A sign of Welcoming may discover
And thus eternally may take Heart,
O Birds and Flowers, if ye take his part.

A BOSTON SERENADE.

Sweetheart, do you know the State
Where the spring-flowers linger late
Into summer;
Where the maids so many be
That they welcome with strange glee
Every male new-comer?

Where the hills are like the breasts
Of a Giantess when she rests
To recover,
Thro' a long, long summer day,
From an hour's volcanic play
With her Titan lover?

Where the woods are rich in trees
And the rivers, though they freeze,
Ring with laughter
From fair shapes that skate along,
Human sunbeams winged with song,
Luring strong men after?

Where the voices of the pines
Preach a doctrine that combines
Health and rapture;
And the birds sing benison
O'er the hunter's venison
Or the salmon's capture?

Sweetheart, do you know the State
Where dark shores a frown like Fate
Oft exhibit;
Where fresh water is, though mute,
Strong as that loud sea, Canute
Couldn't quite prohibit?

Sweetheart, if you know that rare
Region, let us hasten there
For an outing,
Since it is the State most rich
Next the state of mind in which
Lovers cease their doubting.

Don't I make my meaning plain,
For what place can equal Maine
In life's August?
So let's fly from Boston heights
Where upon a poet's flights
Blows so many a raw gust.

On the "Flying Yankee" train
Let's elope to where the Main
Echoes grandest;
Where mosquitoes never hurt
And the waiters at dessert
(Island) smile their blandest.

Sweetheart, wake and come with me
Ere your Sire's dread form I see
Interposing!
Must I, must I longer wait,
Like a coachman at the gate,
While you're idly dozing?

Must I, must I longer doubt,
Like a Lochinvar locked out,
If it matters
Whether some fierce canine brute,
Angered at my passionate suit,
Tears it into tatters?

Or must I conclude 'tis best
To donate my woes a rest
With a lasso?
Or the Frog-pond seek and grant
Reptiles loud a chance to chant
Requiem in basso?

Or to lectures by J. Cook
Must I for quietus look,
Or a panac—
Ëa find in Fashion's "fad"—
With Theosophy run mad
And be simply "mana§?"

(Envoi.)

No! Base thoughts of Night, away!
For she comes, my Light, my Day—
With a warning
Finger on her rosy lips
And, as down the path she trips,
Crowns the world with morning.

IN PERSIA.

Out of the ebon splendor of Night
  Steal me Night's innermost charm, O Poet!
The soul of the Rose in a breeze takes flight;
  Steal it in song ere the Rose may know it!

Nay, but you cannot, O thief so clever,
  Steal night's ebon, so starry fair;
For its glory hath centered forever and ever
  In that wonderful crown, my sweetheart's hair.
And as for the soul of the Rose, with reason,
  From the grasp of your song that, also, slips;
For the soul of the Rose took flight in season
  And is safe in the heaven of my sweetheart's lips.

OF LIFE.

I know a lovely Valley
  Which hath most balmy Air,
'Mid Hills of Roses and of Snow
Where Brooks of Milk and Honey flow,
  Lies hid that Valley fair.

But some time in that Valley —
  Ah! some time, if God wills —
A Dawn-like Vision, white and pink,
May nestle warm and softly drink
  The Fountains of those Hills.

The Name of this fair Valley?
  O Maid and Bride and Wife,
As long as married lips may meet
In mystic Music deeply sweet,
  'Tis the Valley of the Shadow of Life.

TWO DREAMS.

(His.)

If a Rose could sing
In just one song
All it dreamed of spring
Through the winter long,
Would it pray the zephyr to lend its tone,
Or the brook that maketh a mimic moan
Over some cruel, hard-hearted stone?
Or the mating bird, who sings his best
On the bough that shadows his covert nest?
Ah! no, my Beautiful, thine alone
Of all the music to Echo known,
Thy sweet soprano, with silvern ring,
Would be the voice
Of its loving choice,
If a Rose could sing!

(Hers.)

Could I be a Rose for a sweet, swift hour,—
A passionate, purple, perfect flower,—
Not a breath would I spare to the vagrant air,
For the woodland warbler I would not care:
But oh! if my human lover came,
Then would I blush like a heart of flame —
Like a heart of flame I would send a sigh,
A note of perfume, when he drew nigh,
That should make him take me ere bees could sip,
That should woo him to me with bloomy lip;
Till, his kisses culling the flower of me,
My petals close on his lips would close,
And — once more a Woman I think I'd be,
Could I be a Rose!

THE DOMINANT.

The secret of the vast and voiceful sea
  Blends and sublimes all noises near it heard,
  Chant of blind bard with scream of northern bird
Or spicy whisper of south wind set free
From sleep in some Floridian orange-tree
  Where the long noonlight seems to stay unstirred:
  Yet Ocean finds its dominant in one word,
  One little word that o'er the breakers roar
Leaps ever to a myriad lips and brings
A serene rapture, that forever clings:
  Yea, though wrecked hopes by hundreds heap the shore
  Of Life's dark Ocean, yet forevermore
Still to wise ears the small word, Love, shall be
  The secret of the vast and voiceful sea.

EXTRAVAGANZA.

Give me the skies for a scroll—
For a pen, thy soul,
  Belovéd, and I will write
Stars by which men may steer
  Through shadows and clouds of night,
Past reefs of danger, 'mid fogs of fear,
To the haven of Heaven that is ever near;
  So very near and clear in truth
  Men see it not in their heedless youth
As I, most happy and so most wise
Of all the poets under the skies,
Have watched its welcoming waves arise
From the deep, sweet sea of my lady's eyes.

AMERICA.

O Mother land, I love thee
  Each day with larger heart,
I count no dream above thee,
  'Tis thou my true love art.

Not for thy stately mountains,
  Not for thy rivers grand,
Not for the countless fountains
  Of power at thy command.

Not for thy heroes, tameless
  As eagles, now enskied
In fame — but for thy nameless,
  True hearts on every side.

Yea, for thy men and women,
  The husbands and the wives,
Whose love grows never dim in
  The dusk of lowly lives —

True hearts forever giving,
  Yea, hungry to bestow,
Who find this life worth living,
  Because they make it so —

My sisters and my brothers
  Of the most common clan
Whose lives, laid down for others,
  Build up the future man.

LOVE'S MYSTERY.

I cannot count the myriad things
  That mesh my inmost soul to thine,
  The kiss so human, yet divine,
The look that lifts me, lends me wings;

The low, sweet voice that doth no wrong
  To long, sweet silence 'twixt our souls,
  The tone that every care cajoles
And when it ceases hints of song.

Why do I love thee? 'Tis, indeed,
  No easy task to tell thee why:
  That thou art thou and I am I
Seems the best answer at my need.

THE MARRIAGE OF DEATH

They were good old days, when the blood of a man
  Thro' his veins like a crimson cataract ran;
Played purpler than wine, rayed redder than fire,
  At the rush and the flush of a strange desire.
They were dazzling days, when the blood of men
  (The Reign of Terror they called it then)
Flowed faster than ever before it flowed
  At a touch too much of Tyranny's goad,
And the harvests of heaven by that red, red rain
  Were made most plentiful. But 'twas plain
That days so good could not long remain,
  And never — ah! never — might dawn again.
So the people of France got drunk with blood —
  Drunk and drowned in the self-same flood;
But up on that deluge of human hate,
  And down to our desolate day so late,
One flower has floated, defying Fate —
  A flower divine that shall bloom above
All waves of all times — and that flower is Love!

Hark to the trembling of Europe's thrones!
  No, 'tis the tumbrils over the stones,
In mimicry, doubtless, of dying groans,
  Rumbling and rattling their wooden bones;
But the summer morning is hardly done
  Ere a sanguine cloud overblows the sun

For the odor and color and motion of blood
Seem as much in the sky as down in the mud
Of beautiful Paris, that scarlet Beast,
Who is holding a carnival, cannibal feast
Of blood, blood, blood, with cries of "more"
From a mad mob never so mad before.
Yet, tho' 'tis done by the coil of might,
'Tis draped with a goodly show of right;
And the Judge in his high tribunal sits
With that calm, wise look which a judge befits.
But mark! as he daintily trims his nails,
What tiger glances each eyelid veils!
And yet, with expression slightly bored,
He condemns to the same death lackey and lord;
High-born lady and poor grisette
On this level of fashion at last have met;
Vice and virtue, folly and fame,
Here are balanced and judged the same;
For his Honor, the Judge, hath a pride serene
In raising all ranks — to the guillotine.

But at length, by this legal sameness tired,
A spice of variety he desired;
And, rolling his eyeballs, chanced to spy
The river Seine that was dancing by
And laughing up gold to the sunbeams' kiss.
Ah! what joy to the Judge was a sight like this,
Since it gave him a fancy fairy-fine
As the web of a spider where dewdrops shine;
For the Judge in his way was a humorist gay,
And the ghost of a grin round his lips did play,
As the tumbril emptied two prisoners more
To keep up the morning's usual score.
Two victims more — a marchioness, fair
Enough for a castle in the air,

With eyes of sky and with sunny hair;
And could she have smiled on that mob so wild,
For sure it had wept like a penitent child;
But no smile had she save the calm contempt
Of patrician lips: she had never dreamt
Of meeting such rabble so close — as death;
Or vexing her nose with such glomerate breath.
And there, beside her, stept from the cart,
As proud as if he had a kingdom won,
With a glow on his cheeks like the rose's heart,
A Breton nobleman's natural son —
A love-child he, in whose veins, as man,
The passion that made him redoubled ran,
And kept him ever in Danger's van,
Burning to raze out by deeds of worth
The leprous stain of his luckless birth.

O! a splendid sight was this gallant knight,
Contrasted there with that lady bright;
For his eyes' dark blue had the darkest hue
That midnight vapors unveil to view
In chasms of azure, where stars be few;
And his curls were black as the burning track
Of the bolt that follows the thunder-crack,
When clouds by mountains are baffled back.
But it was not their beauty that stirred one so,
Or a sense of the doom they must undergo,
As the curious thrill of a power more strong
E'en than the madness of that mad throng
Who thirsted to see them condemned and sped —
To see down-rolling the golden head
With the dark locks tangled and spattered red!
Then silence shadowed that lurid air
One moment — a silence so strange, so rare,
It was felt like an angel hovering there;

Till the Judge began with an accent bland
And a gentle wave of his jeweled hand:

"Aristocrats, death was the only boon
Ye could not withhold from the peasant loon;
But the peasant loon is to-day a King
And ye shall soon be — not anything!
The bird o' the air, the fish o' the sea
In a little hour shall be more than ye.
It were pity, indeed, that so fine a pair
Of noble bipeds should scent the air
With the same corruption as common clay,
When ye die, as we all must, and ye to-day.
Ahem! methinks 'twould be well, fair dame,
If your pale, proud face could be put to shame —
Shame worse than ever, with easy grace,
Your kinsmen wrought on our slavish race,
When they honored our maids with a chaste embrace.
Ay, truly, we were a slavish race —
Ay, verily, France was a knavish place;
But the people have risen to ring your knell,
And methinks, O Lily, it would be well —
Yes, well, fair face with your golden crown —
To send you blushing the whole way down,
Down, down to the hell whose counterfeit strong
Ye have stamped on the people of France so long.
I therefore ordain that from ye twain
Each garb and garment shall be ta'en,
And ye shall be bound in a single chain
For an endless bath in the river Seine.
Naked ye came to this world, and so
To the next, together, ye twain shall go;
And as your God's an aristocrat, too,
Perchance ye can join the celestial crew
And 'lord' it and 'lady' it up in the blue."

The Judge stopped short, lest an overflow
Of passion should mar the judicial show.
Near to the prisoners the jailers drew,
His Honor's bidding right there to do;
And worse than the roar of a prairie fire
Wed to a whirlwind, higher and higher
A laughing shout from the populace came;
But as thunder can render the wild sea tame—
Being the voice of a grander power—
So down from the peak of that luminous hour,
The voice of that lady, pure and fresh,
Like a spirit triumphing over flesh,
Rang forth so strangely sweet and clear
The very dead might have waked to hear,
And the vast, fierce circle of breathing men
To a death-like silence were charmèd then:

"O! noble Judge, one word I crave
Before I go to the waiting wave.
O! generous Judge, one word I pray
Before these jailers have their way
With this poor body, this empty shell,
Where the pearl of soul may no longer dwell.
I beseech you not, by your mother's breast,
And the memories pure of that sacred nest;
I beg you not, in your daughter's name,
To recall your sentence of seeming shame.
It may be true that my sires have done
Such wrongs to you, that God's eye, the sun,
Will not veil itself in a frown of cloud,
But will seem to smile at your vengeance proud,
And in sympathy with the gloating crowd.
It may be righteous, and therefore I,
As a slight atonement, am glad to die—
Am proud to pass like that lady fair

Who, years ago, with streaming hair
Rode up and down through the common street,
Clad only in goodness from crown to feet.
So deem not, O! man, the intended shame
Will make my cheek like a flower of flame;
For to spirits that face Futurity,
Engirdled with Christian purity,
What shame can happen from outside things?
I shall need no angels with dazzling wings
To shield me here from polluting eyes,
Though I hear them calling me now from the skies,
And bidding me conquer with heavenly faith
The bodily dread of this painful death—
This painful death which I now embrace
In the humble hope it may raise our race
To a purer purpose of life, perchance,
And thus be a blessing to you and France;
But as for this man who standeth here—
So near to death, yet so far from fear—
I pray you spare him, because in truth
Since first I knew him, a village youth,
Though half a noble in his desent,
His life to the poor has been always lent.
For the cause of the people his tongue has pled,
So why should the people desire him dead?
O! Judge, behold! on one knee I bend
And pray you to spare him, my childhood's friend,
My womanhood's lover, whose only sin
Against the people, they know, hath been
That a lady's heart he tried to win—
Tried, though on Poverty's slippery bank,
To bridge with his love the dark river of rank.
So, Judge, for the sake of your own dear wife,
Let me die alone — give me back his life —
Let him live for the people — "

"Stop!" roared the Judge;
"Not another word of this lovesick fudge!
He shall die, the hound! 'Tis enough to know
That noble blood in his veins doth flow.
Were it only a drop, he should die — should die,
Had he none at all, for aiming so high
As to love a lady like you, instead
Of being content with a peasant's bed.
On, guards, to your duty! 'Tis growing late,
And for this fair couple the angels wait;
Which 'twere highly uncivil to make them do;
When, moreover, our dinners are waiting, too."

He paused, the force of his humor grim
For a little space overpowering him:
He paused, and a stir, like the first faint breeze
That breaks the mirror of tropic seas
In a dead calm sleeping, began to creep
Through that crimson crowd; when clear, though deep,
Like the thunder of a sunset gun
Bidding farewell to a summer sun,
Sprang forth the voice of the lover, filled
With a triumph not to be stayed or stilled:

"Oh! Judge, I thank thee for my doom,
Thou hast given to death a more radiant bloom
Than ever existence smiled on me.
In truth, I could almost kneel to thee,
As to a god, O man most kind,
Although no mercy thou hast designed.
Yet I thank thee with every drop o' the blood
That laughs thro' me like a fiery flood.
For I 've loved this woman all my life:
She could not, or would not, become my wife,
Since the stream of her veins its hue derives

From the crystalest current of kingly lives;
And I — I am part o' the people, base-born,
But a rose now grows on my life's long thorn,
I am crowned a king by this doom — in sooth,
I feel like a God of eternal Youth.
What! close — so close to the woman I love?
Let the gay Seine sing, as it rolls above,
My heart will sing louder before it stops,
And the bubble, life, from my vision drops.
Ah! to me she will grow with a drowning grasp,
As I hold her and fold her in closer clasp
Than the cruel chain or the river deep
In whose bed our bones will forever sleep.
Ah! to me she will cling as the chain drags down,
And perchance she will kiss me, once, as we drown,
Being touched at last by my love so long —
Ay, longer than life and than death more strong.
Yet at first, O man of the icy smile,
When I heard thee speak, for a little while
My heart with hate would have laughed to see
Thy spirit punished (as men may be
Through countless years by the judgment-flame)
For seeking to wreak an unspeakable shame
On the sacred woman who standeth there,
Like the angel of France condemned to bear,
For a time communion with things as base
As the coward hate of thy cruel face.
But since with a smile of eternal bloom
Her soul hath welcomed the shameful doom,
My soul wings up to the height of hers,
And hatred no longer my vision blurs.
I see the future of France as fair
In purpose and power as that woman there;
And so, I thank thee, O cruel mind,
Although no goodness thou hast designed.

Yea, Judge, I thank thee! and when alone
Thou standest in face of Jehovah's throne,
O Judge, for judgment, I will leap
To thy side, if I were in Hell's deepest deep,
And unabashed I will plead for thee
With the deed this day thou hast done to me;
And I'll pray Lord Christ that I may take
Thy term of punishment for the sake
Of this great glory — to die in those arms —
Close-holding that treasure of measureless charms.
Yes, life is worth living! O sweet river Seine,
I thirst for thy waters with every vein.
We shall go down together, as one flesh, we twain —
We twain as one flesh, and perhaps we shall rise
To that place the heart claimeth, a home in the skies,
And, still, still together! O! girl with gold hair
And soft budding bosoms unblushed with despair
At this fashion of dying, which worse would appear
Than dying itself to a spirit less clear,
Less pure than thou art, Love — I pray thee forgive
My delight to die thus, tho' we thus could not live.
Forgive me, O Love, for I love thee so much,
Nor will I thy lips with my lips try to touch,
As we sink down together from sight of the sun,
Unless thou shalt make me a sign I have won —
Won, with France, thy last heart-beat. Now, Judge,
I am done.
Come, Jailers, my groomsmen, prepare me, and I,
Who have lived in deep love, will in deeper love die."

* * * * * * * * *

The years have rolled on, and the Seine as it rolls
Hides the place of their bodies — but France has their
souls.

TURNING THE CORNER.

Softly I paused to watch her out of sight,
My Soul's Delight!
At the first corner suddenly she turned,
Oh! how I yearned
With joy unspeakable, when her true eyes —
In glad surprise
To catch me thus at her own tender trick —
Flashed me a quick,
A quickening glance that said: "O sweet, sweet Heart,
Tho' kept apart
For now, so full of longing I am filled
My soul doth build
A bridge of dreams, wherever it may be,
Ever to thee."
This having said with her pure eyes that are
Sweeter by far
Than aught of earth or heaven — except her lips —
Away she trips
Taking my heart but — how my bosom stirs! —
She leaves me hers.

HUNTING-SONG.

I.

Once more in the saddle and riding to hounds!
Tho' our coursers are bounding, our joy has no bounds,
And how can we paint it, or limn it, in verse
This joy without limit we're bound to rehearse?
Harkaway! Harkaway!
How the spirit grows young,
As we see the gay play
Of the hounds giving tongue!
Harkaway! How she springs
Over hollow and hill!
Molly Hare, had you wings,
We would follow you still.

II.

Once more in the saddle! O breeze of young morn,
He who loves not thy kiss has no right to be born —
To be borne on a beautiful, race-loving horse,
With faithful dogs near, as a matter of course.
Hillyho! How the sun,
Like a jolly old boy,
The race that we run
Hastens up to enjoy —
Leaves behind him the night,
As we do all care,
When we follow the flight
Of the hounds and the hare.

III.

Once more in the saddle! On, on, till the gale
In the flame of our speed has to flicker and fail!
On, on, till the hills reel like ships in a storm
And the hare flies so fast that she loses her form!
Hilly-ho! Hilly-ho!
We are merrymen all
Recking not, as we go,
If our pride gets a fall;
Over bush, over stream,
Over fence how we fly,
Like a wild, whirling dream
'Twixt the earth and the sky!

IV.

But when the hunt's over and Molly hangs calm
By the saddle, oh! tell me, has conscience a balm
For the thought of her murder so wantonly done?
Ah! no, answers Echo, unless there be one
In the fact — Hilly-ho! —
That a hare stewed in wine,
Either Port or Cliquot,
Is so wondrously fine
That if Man were a hare
And were wise, he would wish,
After life's wear and tear,
To become such a dish!

SAPPHO.

Upon a height, upon a height of song,
A maiden sits whose bosom ne'er hath heaved
With the dark billows that to Love belong,
Who hath not been deceived, who hath not grieved.

From the bright bow of her delicious lips
Arrows of music, like to sunbeams, spring;
And like the shafts upon the shoulder tips
Of Phœbus, loud in human hearts they ring.

Greece shuts her eyes to listen, as the lay
From Lesbos-isle o'er-sings the echoing sea,
And in the purple fields of nether day
The shade of Homer brightens wondrously.

Tears fill those eyes, long blind to human strife —
  Tears of keen pleasure, such as Hector shed,
When on the fragrant bosom of his wife
  The hero's baby hid a startled head.

And in that grove of cypresses severe
  That sadly sentinel the Stygian stream,
When Sappho's music brims her empty ear,
  The ghost of Helen smiles through her dark dream.

For never yet, since naked from the wave
  That climbed her, clamorous for a last embrace,
Arose that goddess, crueller than the grave,
  With gleams like laughters in her gliding grace, —

O! never yet, since Venus like a flower
  Rose from the subject sea, hath woman's word
The world's deep heart with such mysterious power,
  The world's deep heart, like the deep ocean, stirred.

But if the shadows in the populous vasts
  Of Death's domain thrill at the song divine,
Oh! how much deeper is the spell it casts
  On those yet quaffing Life's resplendent wine!

No wonder maids of Lesbos 'neath the moon
Dance till the day comes blushing up the hill,
And then, in coverts apt for amorous swoon,
Till noon bring sleep, of dream-love take their fill.

No wonder men of Lesbos are inspired
To loftier aims of love, to grander deeds
Of patriot purpose by the singer fired;
But now, alas! her own full bosom bleeds:

Phaon has come; and on her perfect lips
The song's perfection ceaseth. She is mute,
While from her sudden-tremulous palms there slips
Quick to her feet the sudden-rifted lute.

Phaon has come: alas! for happy days,—
Alas! for innocence of girlish youth,—
Her eyes are dazzled by his careless blaze
And all his coinage has the ring of truth.

Strange! Other men as beautiful as he
In Lesbos, lovely land, have wooed her warm,
And often sworn to her on bended knee
Her sweet song could not match her face and form.

But Phaon proudly towers above the rest,
And at his lightest word each ruddy drop
In her bright body, hurrying to her breast,
Burns with a madness that no will may stop.

"I love him, love him — but does he love me?"
Ah? question asked for ages, — seldom yet
Securely answered — by what hard decree
In woman's rose-heart must that thorn be set?

"I love him, love him," in her eager ear
The small bird sings it, brightly fluttering by;
Or, when she wanders by the ocean drear,
The billows moan it, and the winds reply.

When she believes he loves her in return,
The summer days a splendor more serene
Are gemmed with, and the nights more lovely burn,
While stars, like golden hearts, throb large and keen.

When she believes he doth not love her — oh!
The night is not so gloomy as the day,
Because with day her mind's worst shadows go,
And sleep with dreams her anguish can allay.

But he hath spoken — oh! the golden tongue,
Oh! jewel words, forever to be worn!
He loves her: he hath said it — or hath sung,
For speech is music on this happy morn.

Away with doubts, away with fears, make room!
Alas! the world is narrow for such bliss:
One life is narrower still to hold the bloom,
The infinite flower, of that first double kiss!

Sappho is crowned so tall with happiness,
She cannot stoop to sing as erst she sang:
To voice her secret joy would make it less;
To set it to a tune would be a pang,

Because 't would seem to limit it, and so
In Phaon's arms she lets the moments fly,
Each night her passion gaining in its glow,
Each day her worship soaring still more high.

But the hour comes that comes with certain pace
To all things human, be they glad or sad:
There is a shadow on her Phaon's face;
His voice forgets the tender tones it had.

Yet still he seeks her side, and, cruelly kind,
Lingers, — and so hope lingers, — and she tries
With strange, new fancies to enmesh his mind,
E'en as she dons new robes to snare his eyes.

But the hour comes that comes with certain pace,
And Phaon comes not to the trysting-tree!
His heart is tangled in a newer grace —
Another face, perhaps, more fair than she.

What then, to lure him back, shall she attempt —
Poor Queen of Song, still eager to be slave
Of one light man who never could have dreamt
What an immensity of love she gave?

"Yea, I will sing some world-compelling song,
My long-neglected lute I will retake."
Alas! her spirit's discord is too strong:
The music's heart, like hers, can only break.

"Thou, too, art false! Down, down, false lute!" she cries
"If from thy secret chambers of delight
I cannot win one song, how vain my sighs
Would be to summon Phaon to my sight!

"Gone is my gift — my magic is o'erspelled:
O thou, dear Goddess of the silver bow,
Let now my glorious misery be quelled:
To ease this heart I pray thee overthrow

"This brain with one swift arrow! Goddess pure,
Most glorious Moon, mother of dreams, be kind;
Since for this woe there be no earthly cure,
Rain down a heavenly madness on my mind!"

The goddess hears her and in pity bends,
Remembering Latmos and Endymion:
Swifter than lightning is the beam she sends,
And lo! a shade on Sappho's mind is thrown.

But her dark eyes flash brighter than before,
And loud she sings — so loud that, stunned with fright,
In the dense bosk the nightingales no more
With thick, precipitate song o'erpraise the night.

A shade on Sappho's mind, and now, and now,
As if in symbol of high sympathy,
A cloud is gathering on heaven's azure brow
From veils of vapor that have left the sea.

Louder she sings and, singing, blindly takes
A little goat-path up the precipice
At whose rough base the angry ocean breaks
With a long rolling roar and then a seething hiss.

See now! she climeth to the topmost crag:
'Twixt crag and cloud she poiseth like a bird,
Her long, dark locks out-floating like a flag:
Her bosom panting like a racer spurred.

The sacred fury bubbles to her mouth;
From that divinest of all human throats,
Sweet as a honeyed zephyr of the south,
Loud as a silver clarion, come the notes:

"Lo! I am She who sprang from the deep sea:
My car, a pearl, was drawn by rival doves,
And, like the play of little flames, round me
Gamboled a roseate cloud of baby Loves:

"Precocious Cupids, armed with quip and jest,
To tease the senses of humanity;
But ah! my sleep in the sea's womb was best —
Was best for mortals, and most sure for me.

"For, when deep calleth unto deep, above
Imagination must the tempest soar,
And, when the very Queen of Love doth love,
The peace of gods deserts her evermore.

"So I, who was a goddess yesterday,
Am now a feather for the breath of Fate;
Dead is my lover, dead and gone away
Down through the wide, the ever-open gate.

"Then let me go, because I cannot die,
Back to the dreamful womb from whence I sprang;
O Mother, Mother Ocean! look, I fly
Theewards to solve me of this earth-born pang."

A flash of eyes — or is it lightning now?
A tossing of white arms — or is it spray?
And Sappho crowns no more the crag's dark brow;
Her beauty, like a dream. hath passed away.

Then from the cradling waves ascends a sigh,
Half pain, half joy: the dolphins in their leap
Pause, and the sea-mews pipe a puny cry
Against the thunders gathering o'er the deep;
But Sappho, free from dreams, now sleeps the sleep.

FACE TO FACE.

Idling, not long ago, upon the street
They named for him who was our country's sire
In the brave town where Wit and Wisdom meet
Daily — for human freedom to conspire —

My vagrant glance within a bookstore spied
Two portraits — one, of him whose mummied clay,
With dark devices of rare spices dried,
Science identified the other day.

Rameses, Pharaoh — many names had he
And many slaves toiled hard to rear his tomb,
Pyramidal, 'twixt the Nile's fertility
And the sad, billowy desert's silvery gloom.

The other portrait was the homely face
Of him whose pen-stroke made a nation free
And raised to civic rank an alien race,
Dark heritors of a centuried slavery.

Lincoln and Pharaoh! Was it chance alone,
Or some design behind the shopman's hand
By which their lithographs were quaintly thrown
Together, for a contrast strangely grand?

For these two faces typify, indeed,
Two forces, ever warring in thy soul,
O Man — strange earthworm of material greed,
Mysterious moth who dream'st a starry goal!

Nay, more: these faces typify, besides,
The powers of Progress and Conservatism,
That make the nations rise and fall in tides
Forward and backward on Time's dark abysm.

But of the men themselves what may we say,
Since Pentaur's verse on Luxor's pictured wall
Sufficeth Pharaoh's fame, and Lowell's lay
Of Lincoln's greatness hath so well said all —

Save this: One reared an altar unto Fame,
Cemented by the sweat and blood of men;
The other to earth's highest office came
To widen all men's liberty — and then,

To fall a victim to a madman's hate,
Just as his country rose again, sublime,
Beautiful, though ensanguined! Oh! strange fate!
O most pathetic mystery of all time!

IMMORTAL.

[September, 1881.]

O Music, break thine heart
In notes that tremble and part—
Tremble and part forever;
Since to the Silent Land
Hath gone a pilgrim grand
To come back never.

Into the Unknown Dark
Man vanisheth like a spark:
But, like a star supernal,
Love fills the vast abyss
With the echo of Earth's last kiss—
A kiss eternal!

The sun sets—to arise
Brighter, in bluer skies:
Man dies, while Nature liveth:
Despair or Doubt are ours
Of the very fruits and flowers
This one life giveth.

The reality doth seem
So pitiful to the dream,
The dream so false by fleetness,
That we who live for life
Find it unworth the strife,
E'en at full sweetness.

But he, our pilgrim grand,
Into the Silent Land
Where steals no pain or passion,
Found life a thing sublime,
And to the courts of Time
Set a new fashion.

His, not to idly muse,
And the world's work refuse:
But his to lead the van on,
Either in halls of state
Or in the fields of fate,
Where speak the cannon.

Martyred! Yet not in vain,
Since by his death we gain
With God a fresh communion:
Closer, for tears that dim
The eyes which looked to him,
Has grown our Union.

Therefore, break not thine heart,
O Music, but depart
And seek the shadowy portal,
Taking to him the rare
Promise that here, as there,
He is immortal!

FRAGMENTS.

Only by those who have past
  Through storms that blind the sun
Can a soul of light be gained at last
  And a crown of calm be won.

Shadow of smoke upon running water —
  How it symbols the Life of man,
Pain his mother, Sorrow his daughter,
  Work his wife, since the world began!

Nay, how filmy our present vision!
  Deeper gaze through the river's run!
From dark trance into bright transition
  Dances Life, like a mote i' the sun.

Like the twin miracles of dawn and sunset,
  Which in reality are only one,
Are the twin mysteries of birth and dying: —
  When Life ends here, then elsewhere 'tis begun.

IN VICTORIS HUGONIS MEMORIAM.

"Il poête s'en va dans les champs;
Il admire, il adore."
CONTEMPLATIONS DE VICTOR HUGO.

I.

Into the field the poet goes
To admire and to adore;
Scents he many a wilding rose;
Hears the brooks their laughters pour;
Hears the mating birds propose;
And his deep heart overflows
Into music more and more;
Therefore swifter than before —
Oh! how swift each fond heart knows —
Into the field the poet goes.

II.

Into the field the poet goes
And his eyes have happy tears
For the trysting-place he nears
Where a maiden like a rose,
Like a brook and like a bird,
Waits to list his loving lore;
Trembles for the moment, when,
All her heart with rapture stirred,
She shall crown him evermore,
She shall kiss him King of men;
So, too joyous for a word,
Flushed like summer just at close,
Into the field the poet goes.

III.

Into the field the poet goes
To admire and to adore
And the heaven a lover knows
Goeth with him evermore.
In the music of his heart
All things take a choral part —
Birds and brooks and booming bees
And the sisterhood of trees,
Wavering to a wooing breeze;
So, a higher heaven to seize,
With a face that gleams and glows
Into the field the poet goes.

IV.

Into the field the poet goes
With the key of Nature's door;
But, some day, to flower that blows,
Bird that mates and brook that flows,
Or to lips of loving lore,
With a face that gleams and glows
He returneth nevermore;
For, with dark plumes waving o'er
Faces faint with sorrow sore,
Silent, to his first repose,
To a deep sleep under snows,
Or to dreams beneath the rose,
Into the field the poet goes.

(L'ENVOI.)

Sisters, brothers of the rose,
Maids and men of roseate blood,
Hearts that summer overflows
With her rich and radiant flood

Of new hope, new love, new life,
Or of old love grown more sweet,
All whose lips in longing meet —
Though with rhymes ye be not rife,
Though ye sing no sounding songs,
Though ye gain no fadeless fame,
Poetry to ye belongs;
Ye are poets — by the same
Token of devoted life
As my Hugo, and as he,
Safe from past and present strife,
Shall the future's monarch be;
So may ye, with faith's repose,
Follow past the bound of breath
Where, to kiss all-amorous Death,
Into the field the poet goes.

FREDERICK III.

Mortuum, Imperator, te Salutamus.

Not that thou wert a King! We hate the name,
We whose rich blood on Marston Moor was poured,
We whose begetters followed Hampden's sword,
That sacred symbol of avenging flame;
We whose great-grandsires put King George to shame;
Whose grandsires made proud England yield the sea;
Whose fathers died that all men might be free;
We — among nations the most brave and great —
Despite thou wert a King, bow down to thee
Our haughty heads, O Frederick, because,
With superb calmness facing a black fate,
Dying, thou didst essay to make thy laws
Less cruel and thy people's life more dear —
Therefore we lay, O King, a heart-rose on thy bier.

TO WENDELL PHILLIPS.

Fanatic! — in whose eyes
The tears each day would rise
For woes that were not thine;
Fanatic! — on whose brow
Victory, written now
In Fame's eternal shine,
Maketh to us — a sign!

Sounding the soul's alarm,
Thine was the voice to charm
E'en serpents of their hiss;
Thine the lift eyes whose light,
Like lightning late at nigh ,
Forespoke the radiant kiss
That fills the Dawn with bliss.

O great soul, rapt away
From out our sight for aye,
But not from out our ken,
Thy magic was no myth;
A spell to conjure with
Thy name remains, as when
Thou spakest among men!

For, wheresoever Wealth
And Caste by force or stealth
Essay to hold in fee
The minds of men, thy voice
Condemns the cringer's choice,
Makes brave men braver be,
Makes free men still more free.

A QUEEN AND A PIONEER.

[Read at the Breakfast given in honor of Amelia B. Edwards, the English Novelist and Egyptologist, by the New England Woman's Press Association, Boston, November 20, 1889.]

From the land that has queened it for ages,
With ever-extending sway,
By the spell of her seers and sages,
Writ large on History's pages,
From the land that has queened it for ages,
We welcome a Queen to-day.

Not Queen by a coronation
Of custom and pride of place,
But hers is a loftier station;
Yes, hers is an elevation,
And a spirit-coronation,
That elevates all the race.

For, not content with the pleasure
Which her graceful novels lend,
To gather up Learning's treasure
By a sacrifice of leisure,
She hath reckoned a sweeter pleasure,
Since it serveth a nobler end.

Yet not alone do her splendid
Labors for learning count;
By women who have ascended
Is the woman-sphere extended,
And the average grows more splendid,
As night with the stars that mount.

Yea, by such lives laborious
Is quicker shapen the plan
Of the day, when woman glorious
Shall arise — arise victorious —
No longer the slave laborious,
Or the tempting toy of man!

And it totters — that wrong to woman,
By the barbarous ages piled,
That Pyramid inhuman,
Abhorred by every true man,
Which presseth down the woman,
And even the growing child.

And oh! of that ancient slavery
Not alone shall the life outrun,
For, likewise losing its bravery,
And branded as demon-knavery,
Man's present industrial slavery
Shall cease from under the sun.

Yea, the worse than Dantean vision
Of children in store and mill
Shall cease, and oh, fair fruition!
Full half of that new condition,
That era of juster vision,
Will be owing to woman's will!

And so, from the land that for ages
Has queened it, we welcome here
For the Past lit up by her pages,
For the Future her life presages,
From the land that has queened it for ages,
A Queen and a Pioneer.

LINES TO JULIA WARD HOWE.

[Read at the Celebration of Her Seventieth Birthday.]

Seventy years old — Nay, madam, 'tis not so,
For in the apt phrase of your daughter's tongue
The hearts that know you do most surely know
For seventy splendid years you have been young.

In truth, your life reglimpsing, it would seem
That you right early by some magic skill
Found the fair fountain of De Leon's dream,
And feel its crystal inspiration still.

What is the magic — what the secret power
That keeps the smile of youth upon your face,
Stays and delays "the inevitable hour,"
Making each added year an added grace?

You would not tell us, if perchance you could,
Because your modesty would make no claim,
As we have heard you in self-judging mood
To others give the credit of your fame.

So we must tell you through this medium poor
The real secret of your youth to day,
And why your fame in freshness will endure
Long as our language on the world hath sway.

Not because birth and beauty have been yours
And yours the gift of music and of song;
But this, that you have spent your richest stores
To help humanity your whole life long.

When the land languished for a battle-hymn
And in defeat her sons began to lag,
Yours was the voice in morning's twilight dim —
A lifting breeze for Freedom's drooping flag!

And when the final fetter had been riven,
And the black chattel made forever free,
Not sated with the one chance life had given,
You sought for more to lift humanity.

Fearless of ostracism by Fashion's clan,
Ready your social empire to resign,
You claimed for woman equal place with man
By might of brain and right of heart divine.

And, though not yet that battle has been won,
It needs no prophet to discern it clear,
For in Time's glass the deep sands as they run
Brighten, like your deep life, with every year.

And in that day that some now here shall see
Tender and beautiful as the feet of Peace
Upon the mountains — in that time to be,
When every form of slavery shall cease:

When in Wealth's prisons, factories vast and vile,
No growing girl shall toil for daily bread —
No childing woman, with a bitter smile,
Ask — "Is it not far better to be dead?"

When our industrial system, most absurd
As well as cruel, shall be put away,
Your name, O Woman, will be louder heard
As one who worked to speed that golden day.

ONE OF THE LOWLY.

Splendidly dark and darkly splendid
E'en like ebony seems her hair,
And the hues in her deep eyes blended
Would drive a Raphael to despair;

Violet now as a tropical ocean
Under the noon-day's vertical glint;
Then again, at some soft emotion,
Softening down to a turquoise tint.

But her eyes, though beyond expression,
Suffer a strange and superb eclipse
And lose their sceptre of soul-possession,
When compared with her luscious lips.

Ah! those lips were by Cupid fashioned
Just for kisses and joyous life —
Kisses pure, though they grow impassioned,
E'en as a sweetheart becomes a wife.

Kisses only for one man treasured,
Hoarded for him till he comes — and then
Poured on him with such love unmeasured
He's the richest of love-crowned men.

Ah! those lips! For one moment's pressure
Gladly a poet his life might pay,
For nothing dreamier, brighter, fresher,
Ever gladdened a poet's way.

But who 's this maid so above description;
Some Queen or wonderful social belle,
With art as deep as the famed Egyptian
Who shook e'en Rome with her dazzling spell?

Ay, who 's this maiden with ebon tresses
And eyes o'erflowing with tender lore
And lips for kisses? Nay, spare your guesses!
She 's only a girl in a candy-store.

Oh, what a wretchedly lame conclusion!
Only a girl in a candy-store!
Oh! what a climax of disillusion —
Nay, my brothers — she 's something more!

All day long, to escape starvation,
Think of the things her soul must bear,
Looks and words that are profanation
From rich old rakes that come gloating there;

Or some gay youth of a higher station
Perhaps bends on her such ardent eyes
That she almost yields to the fascination,
And takes for truth his enamored lies;

Or, fate still worse, her grace finds favor
In her gross employer's muddy sight,
And the cruel, capitalistic slaver
Becomes familiar, as if by right.

Can she resent it and seek another
And safer station on life's hard stage?
No, for she now has a poor, sick mother
Whose life depends on her paltry wage.

These must she suffer, and things more cruel
From the hand of commerce-hardened man,
And still remain an unsullied jewel
'Mid the world's garbage — if she can.

But stop! Are we whom women nourish
From babyhood weak up to manhood strong
So vile in the main that such wrongs must flourish,
Or is the system, we live by, wrong?

Is the present system right, my brothers,
Whereby we people who work all day
See the fruit of our toil become another's,
While we get only the rind for pay?

Must it be as it was in the desert olden
Ere came the wealth-denouncer, Christ,
When to the Jews an image golden,
A half-grown beast, for a god sufficed?

Must it always be so, O social scholar,
Economist, with the furrowed brow?
Yes, there is no king like the dollar,
And the calf of gold is full-grown now.

The many must work forever steady
That the few may be rich; unless, in troth,
Our industrial system is wrong and is ready
To be replaced by a nobler growth.

But down with the doubt! Why, it 's atheistic
To hint that the system which men adore
Needs a turn from the cranks that are socialistic:
It 's perfect now, and it can't be more.

And yet, perchance, there's an anarchistic
Germ in that girl at her heart's red core;
But hush, O Poet, your song so mystic;
She 's only a girl in a candy-store!

Sing, if you will, of her wondrous beauty,
But you mustn't hint she is something more.
Not sermon, but song, is a poet's duty,
And — she 's only a girl in a candy-store.

TO JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

Sweetest of all our singers, though thy face
I have not seen and may not for much time,
Across the sea of music-haunted space
I send thee tribute in a boat of rhyme:
No ponderous argosy of song sublime,
But a light galley this, with fourteen oars;
And yet a freight most precious doth it hold,
Tears brighter than the pearls from Ceylon shores,
Set quaintly in deep smiles more bright than gold!
O singer of the Prairie, sunny-souled,
Ten fameless years ago I hailed thee first
As the new poet men with love would know
Some day; and so, now Fame hath on thee burst,
I bask me, prophet, in thy glory's glow.

ON MY COUCH.

This is the way
I shall lie, some day,
With head thrown back and folded hands,
Silent, even to Love's demands,
In the peace that no man understands
Till it comes on him like a curious crown,
Pressing the rebel nature down
To a most strange humility
That is never found in the realm of breath —
In the field of Love's fertility —
Never dreamed of, indeed, till Death,
The real, the regal Socialist,
Our lips with his equal kiss hath kissed.

This is the way — yes, the very way
I shall lie in the sleep that hath no day
Of resurrection certain quite
Save in dream of lover or eremite.
The pallid priest of a passing faith
May fool the rabble, when he saith,
With upward vision and bated breath,
In Mystery's chamber: "There is no Death."

But we know better — we, who lie
On beds of torture, thirsty to die:
We, brothers of Caliban, all whose lives
Have been deflowered to enrich the hives
Of nonchalant Prospero, unto whom
The priest may promise beyond the tomb
A life of still more golden bloom
If he will — for what care we, who lie
On beds of torture, hungry to die!

Yet who can be certain? The veriest dunce
Is a peer of the wisest when the mind
Such an infinite mystery confronts;
And as good a reason might be assigned
For living again, as for living once;
Though sure there was never a reason why
We Calibans ever under the sky
Should have opened our eyes to be mocked by the glow
Of the golden glory of Prospero.

But this is the way we all shall lie —
Prospero, even as you and I,
O brother Caliban, and the sky
Through which men pray gives no reply
But an empty smile to our question, why?
So, perhaps, my brother, Death amounts
To a general squaring of accounts;
And, after all, in the whirl of suns,
In the limitless, luminous abyss,
What matter to man, if he lives but once,
Though there may be another life than this;
Yet whether he be in his little span
A Prospero or a Caliban,
What matters it all in sooth, to a man,
If, after it all, he must lie some day
In this very way?

FREDRICKSBURG, '62.

'Twas the grandest war that ever was known
To which men eagerly went,
Not on conquest or glory bent,
But to fight for a cause that was not their own:
To die that others might be free
And the beautiful eyes of Liberty see
No shadow of Slavery evermore,
From Massachusetts' resounding shore
To where Mississippi melts at length,
Like a giant who hath spent his strength,
In the splendid, sapphirine waves that flow
From the silver sands of Mexico.

Oh! loud let the trumpet of Fame be blown!
Down to the dust went a centuried sin:
'Twas the grandest war that ever was known,
And one of the hardest fights therein
Was the battle of Fredricksburg, '62;
Ah! that was the year the confederate crew
Seemed most near their game to win.
That was the epoch when Beauregard,
Jackson and Johnston pressed us hard;
When Stuart's cavalry, just for fun,
Galloped right 'round McClellan's camp,
And our General did not fire a gun
Their revelry to damp.
But ah! how quickly the golden sun
Tamed down to a flickering lamp
In that battle of Fredricksburg, '62,
When the Southerners' grape and canister flew

Hitherward, thitherward, everywhere —
Till a swirl of smoke was the lurid air,
And as devil-music from halls of Hell
The rival thunders of shot and shell,
Like billows of ocean, swelled and fell.

But forward, forward, the Twenty-first
Massachusetts Regiment went;
What tho' shells around them burst,
Tearing many a ghastly rent
In the serried columns — still they close,
As calm as a lover who plucks a rose:
And onward they press, and still they stem
The sea of lightning that leaps at them.
Ay, not a man of them holds his breath,
Tho' the living are seen but by flashes of death,
Till they reach the spot where a "sunken road"
Offers the aid of a natural trench;
But even there the shells explode
With a sound whose echo would make you blench,
If you happened to hear it, some peaceful day,
Twenty or thirty miles away.
But just as that "sunken road" they reach,
Sergeant Collins, the color-bearer,
Falls and pours like a wave on the beach
His free heart's blood — a libation rarer
Than ever was offered on any field,
Where the cannon of Europe yet have pealed.

He falls, and the glorious flag-staff reels;
Will the flag fall also to earth's embrace?
Not so; there 's an Irish lad at his heels:
Sergeant Plunket leaps to his place!
Hurrah! The flag is caught and waved

And the regiment's march is rallied, is saved!
Sergeant Plunket — an Irish boy,
Who left a shoe-bench not long ago,
Kissed his sweetheart, his pride and joy,
And rushed to battle with Freedom's foe.
See! how he waves it to and fro,
That glorious flag that to him is dear
As the hope of Ireland and the world —
That flag that shall never be lowered or furled,
While the soul of a Plunket lingers here.

But hark! — and look! Another shell
Bursts in the air right near,
Drowning the terrible Southern yell
And the Yankees' charging cheer.
And Plunket falls, and the banner — No!
He 's up again, tho' both hands are shot
Clean off, and he feels his life-blood go,
But the banner falleth not.
Round it he folds his handless stumps
In a last and vast embrace,
Till another man to the rescue jumps
And Plunket falls on his face:
But how hard he strained it to his heart,
As he gave it a good-by kiss
May never be shown by the painter's art
Or a common rhyme like this;
Yet when men play such a glorious part
What matters it, tho' they miss
A country's thanks? Have they not, instead,
The eternal glow of a deed well done
Which is something better than daily bread
Or any pension under the sun?

And yet, if that quiet Yankee-town,
West Boylston, where young Plunket threw
Aside one day the unfinished shoe —
If that fair town should wish to crown
Some day the central street or square
With a hero's figure, a statue fair
Of snowy marble or granite gray ;
Something out of the common way,
And yet which the commonest passer-by
Might well look up to with kindling eye ;
Something for future men to see
And thrill to — hadn't it better be,
No General grand, with lifted hand,
And haughty gesture of command,
But a lad, upholding a shattered staff,
With handless arms — and no epitaph —
Save the plain name, Plunket, perhaps would do,
Plunket and Fredricksburg, '62.

SYMPATHY.

Only by those who have grieved
Is perfection of soul achieved :
Better a human clod
That aches with the load of life
Than a calm, Olympian God
Who never hath suffered strife !

ON THE BRINK.

Lady, at whose touch I tremble, tingle with a sacred fire
Fed by all my finest feelings of most delicate desire —
Passion pure as light, yet fire-like, ever leaping high and higher.

Fairest, though for thee I dare not yet a tenderer title seek —
Dare not? Nay, the sweet word "Darling," sometime, somehow I must speak,
Though it call an angry, crimson dawn of doom upon thy cheek:

Dawn of doom — my doom — so be it! Better, like a man, to fail
Than to linger in the shadows of uncertainty — as pale
As a ghost ere resurrection whom old grave-thoughts still assail.

I *will* speak — and then one moment may o'erstar my night of years,
May o'erflood my life's long desert with a sea of happy tears —
Till my veins, my veins, run music and my heart its echo hears.

I *will* speak, for in the future many golden days may hide,
Slow to come, but yet as ready as the kisses of a bride,
Days of tranquil, tropic weather — saunterings by the summer tide:

Dreamings in the mellow moonlight — kisses deep and long and sweet,
With the smile of God refining all their joyous, human heat,
When two hearts, long hurt and humbled, into music melt and meet;

When two hearts, long tried and troubled, sing each other into rest
Softer than the death of lilies, lip to lip and breast to breast,
Both caressed and both caressing, both possessing and possessed.

Ah! what days of pure perfection in this world of jarring powers,
Ah! what spiritual summer purple with perpetual flowers,
What a life indeed worth living, O my Darling, may be ours! —

If we only let Love take us, wake us once before Death's gloom,
Tune our tones to softer singing, light our lips to brighter bloom,
Saturate our souls with sweetness, give our noblest longings room.

Thrill us, fill us, lift us, gift us with a glory and a grace,
Fairer than the flush of girlhood — rarer than a Grecian face —
A reality so royal that to dream were commonplace!

Do not tremble at the picture, do not shrink and turn and start
From a poet's fiery worship, from the tempest of his heart;
He from earnest, earliest boyhood has been loving what thou art.

And one night in dreams thou gavest with thy lips such maddening bliss
That he fancies thou wilt give him in some world a crowning kiss;
Ah! the bitter-sweet of dreaming! In some world? Why not in this?

AT PARTING.

Just one more kiss, my darling,
  One long, forgiving kiss;
Since we must part forever,
  Sure, you can give me this:

One long, long kiss uniting
  As by a bridge of bliss
Dark present with dim future —
  Sure, you can give me this.

Alas! my love, my darling,
  How long ago it seems
When we together wandered
  Into the realm of dreams!

But now that realm is ruined
  There 's little more to say
And heedless of our trouble
  The great world wags its way.

The sun still shines as gaily,
  Now we no more are one,
As when, that songful summer,
  Our love-dream was begun;

And where we gathered roses
  In lanes to lovers dear
New dreamers of the old dream
  Will gather them this year;

And then, a few years after,
  Upon the tender turf,
(Above our lonely graves, love,
  Parted by leagues of surf)

New pairs of lingering lovers
  In twilight's hush may stay,
Silent as we below them,
  A moment on their way;

And spelling out the names, love,
  Upon each lichened stone
May wonder if we had, love,
  A romance like their own.

So one more kiss I pray thee
  To set upon the past
A crown of such perfection
  Its light must always last.

One crowning kiss — ah! sweetest,
  Now, now, returns thy heart
In this and this to mine, love,
  And so — we will not part.

MASTODON-SAURUS.

A monster's head is on my doorstep's granite,
A fleshless Caliban, yet wondrous tame;
Sharp snows assail it, summer breezes fan it,
But still it bides the same.

Not the most blinding blizzard of Dakota
Could break its iron slumber, or affect
That irony of silence an iota,
Whereby it wrings respect.

My friend, the man of science, says that action
Was once the purpose of this passive stone;
That once, in this odd lump of petrifaction,
Thought had a towering throne.

Although that Thought, like many a well-throned tyrant,
(My communistic scientist affirms)
Was not to any higher food aspirant
Than fruit, instead of worms.

Which fruit this elephantine iguana
Plucked from strange trees, and then, with steaming breath,
Lay gorged to sleep along some hot savanna,
A shining mark for death.

Ay, myriad foes besieged this lazy fellow —
This huge, mammiferous, pachydermatous fool —
Who only cared for fruitage moist and mellow,
Soft grass and waters cool;

And who, like man too often, half in shadow
And half in sunshine lolling, felt the lure
Of sex alone nor sought an Eldorado
Of Thought or Beauty pure.

"But yet," my friend, the scientist, continues,
Tapping with fine French toe the stony head,
"Through this dull form we with our balanced sinews
And soaring minds were bred.

"Strange, is it not? And I, for my part, wonder
When, in the evolution now called Man,
The curious claim — vain flash from priestly thunder —
Of special soul began."

"Why, as for that, dear dogmatist of science,
Factor of facts which are but transient things,
You've proven (have you not?) that scaly giants
Rose to evolving wings:

That snake turned bird whose notes of loving sweetness
Were hardly hinted in the rattling scale
With which the hideous, hissing Incompleteness
Grooved out a slimy trail.

"Now, if these facts of yours be true — and truly
I doubt them not, for they are comforting;
Since they imply that out of shapes unruly
Must rise a ruling thing: —

"A regal Power with purpose on his forehead
And heart so large it claims for its embrace
(Although its ancestors were saurians horrid)
Eternal time and space:

"And if, my friend, this onward, upward movement
Has been since Earth, the sun-evolved, began —
It seems to me this doctrine of improvement
Need not stand still with Man.

"For if 'tis easy in the opening portals
Of science thus man's rise from slime to solve,
Tis just as easy to suppose from mortals
That angels may evolve."

Then smiles my friend and answers: "Think how vital
Was once this stony head: it had a brain,
Which to its loving mate could make recital
Of pleasure and of pain.

"But you think you have soul, the poet's lever,
Although your ancestors, the reptile crew,
Had none. You pride yourself on mind, tho' fever
Your reason can undo.

"You think that when the shadows come in legions,
And your bright life goes out like my cigar, —
Your soul, like smoke, will rise to fairer regions
Where joys immortal are."

"Nay, friend, I push no claims; but, like an humble
Scholar, I wait till my great Teacher moves:
In hope, because I note, though still men stumble,
Man rises and improves.

"And as this stone, poor head of saurian order,
Perchance had some dreams of the man to be —
So I, who stand on Faith's dim, sunset border,
A grander dawn, a nobler form foresee."

TO LESBIA.

[From the Latin of "Catullus."]

So you ask me, Lesbia darling,
  Like yourself, a question vain:
What's the number of your kisses
  That will quench my thirsty pain?

Now, if you would learn exactly
  The addition's rich amount,
All the sands in vast Sahara,
  Love, you must be sure to count.

Then, if you that sum should finish,
  Yet another would arise;
You would have to reckon truly
  All the stars in all the skies: —

All the stars that gleaming ever,
  Smile so strangely soft and bright
On the furtive lips of lovers
  In the dreamy lull of night.

Count the stars, my love, my darling!
  Ah! your labor would be vain;
I should merely smile, and towards you
  Pout my longing lips again.

THE GRAND ARMY PARADE.

[Boston, August 12, 1890.]

I stand at my bannered window
  And watch the processional file,
Thousands of living heroes, —
  Each face a triumphant smile;
And my heart is beating proudly
  And red as a rose of June
My blood is singing loudly
  To Freedom's onward tune.

When sudden over the pageant
  A solemn cloud is cast,
And jarring the joyous music
  There comes an icy blast;
And instead of the living heroes,
  In chime with a people's cheers,
I behold a dear, dead hero,
  And mine eyes are filled with tears.

I have to turn from the window;
  I can hardly bear the throng,
Which a moment before did thrill me
  More deep than a poet's song;
For the eyes of my wondering spirit
  Behold, by a spirit led,
Liberty's poet, O'Reilly,
  Humanity's soldier — dead!

Struck down in his prime — Ah! mystic,
Beyond all guess or dream,
The will of the Power Eternal
Must aye to our grieving seem:
How often, ah! how often,
Under the patient skies,
The base man lives and prospers,
The great man fails and dies!

But he, our soldier-poet,
Now that his battle 's done,
He would not have us weeping,
For sure 't is a victory won.
His life has been a triumph, —
Witness, ye shrinking powers
Of tyrant and of bigot! —
And that triumph, it is ours.

I turn again to my window;
I watch the radiant throng;
And it seems to me they are marching
To the tune of O'Reilly's song:
And well they may, for never
Has nobler song been sung
Than came like flame from that warm heart — cold;
From that tuneful — silent tongue.

For oh! he loved the people,
Regardless of race or creed,
And his life, it was the garden
Of many a lovely deed;
And wherever our future heroes
Press on to out-trample wrong,
They will march — and march forever —
To the tune of O'Reilly's song.

THE GREAT DIAMOND.

"Long live the King!" they shouted through many a sunny
street,
With clash and crash of cymbal, with shawm and timbrel
sweet:
But in a twilight chamber and in a purple sheet
Lay one man, mute as marble, whose kingship was com-
plete.

"Long live the King — the new King!" the people thun-
dered forth,
Proving with fickle favor how little fame is worth:"
Fame fading as a flower fades, long ere the blustering
North
Hath shot one icy arrow against the Autumn swarth.

But through the festive tumult one creature crept along
Who only heard, with heart deep-stirred, a low, funereal
song;
Who only saw, with freezing awe, the white-robed, priestly
throng —
So like those ghostly candles that make Death's night more
strong!

One only in the city whose heart gave birth to tears,
When to the new King's crowning the people rushed, with
cheers: —
One heart which on the music sailed back the stream of
years
And saw the dead man shining, peerless, above his peers.

So this one heart — a woman's — although the way was hard
For one so old and feeble, now bore her to the yard
Of the far, lonely palace where lingered priest nor bard,
And with a wondrous jewel she bribed the single guard.

On, through the balmy garden, this woman held her way
And climbed the porphyry staircase to where the body lay,
To her unchanged and unestranged by Death's or Time's decay,
For the King had kissed her, years ago, one golden, summer day: —

One royal, summer day, when he and she were young and fair,
The man had kissed her and passed along, leaving the rapture rare
Of a King's grace on a peasant's face, and, though she did not dare
In life to seek those lips again, yet Death now found her there.

For, whilst with kisses of endless love she crowned his brow so white,
Over the eyes of that peasant crone there stole an equal night,
And the courtly throng who returned ere long reeled backward in affright
To behold her, dead, by the dead King's bed, with her eyes still smiling bright.

How came she there? The guard, when seized, confessed and showed the gem,
And the curious courtiers stared amazed, for its beauty o'ermastered them;
And even the new King, as he gazed, felt a passion he could not stem,
For never had such a glory blazed on a monarch's diadem.

'Twas a jewel white as an infant's soul, that holdeth countless hues,
And larger than any rose that blows save those that enclose the dews
Which angels weep, in Paradise, for joy, when God renews
The vanished beauty that some hard duty hath caused a soul to lose.

"But how could a woman so old and poor" said the High-Priest "own such a stone,
Unless, O King, 'tis an evil thing and she were a witch full-grown?"
"Ay, Sire," said a courtier chiming in, "No doubt 'tis the Devil's own;
The price of her soul, which she pawned, to win sure way to this chamber lone."

"You are doubtless right," quoth the new-crowned King, "but this gem escheats to the State;
And, if Eblis himself a claim should bring, I should tell him he sued too late;
Yet, perhaps, 'twere well any evil spell of this mystery to abate,
And with prayer and incense and incantation this room to reconsecrate."

So with lamentation and ululation, with music low and loud,
With many a solemn incantation and many an incense cloud,
And mystic pomp of desolation that awed the common crowd
The secret priests above the dead till midnight bowed and vowed.

Then the royal corpse they laid to rest 'mid a vast vault's
slow decay;
But the woman's body to ground unblest they wisely hud-
dled away.
Yet, spite of them all, blooms up from her breast a death-
less flower, men say,
And the jewel for which her soul was pawned crowns a
Hindoo god to-day.

* * * * * * * * * *

The meaning of this mystery, you ask me, O Bright Eyes
That hold so much heart-history of fancies more than wise,
Of dreams, as weirdly shapen as clouds in summer skies,
And marvellous affections that words can but disguise?

You ask me for the moral laid in this rhythmic nest?
Well, Sweetheart, there be many, but one may please you
best.
Love is the flower eternal on the dark, half-human sod,
And Love the chief crown-jewel upon the brow of God.

DISCIPLINE.

Out of the presses of pain
Cometh the soul's best wine
And the eyes that have shed no rain
Can shed but little shine.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Do you remember
The red September,
When like an ember
From sunset skies
The orchard olden
Looked rosy-golden —
Through silvern mist, a thin disguise:
And I beheld the earth's gay beauty,
Its autumn splendor, full and fruity,
Reflected in your hazel eyes?

Do you remember
The gray November,
When pearl and amber
From hill to shore,
With shadows dimmer,
Was all the glimmer
The languid land at sunset wore?
'Twas then through downcast lids love beckoned,
And you, in one sweet, sudden second,
Looked up, a woman, — girl no more.

Do you remember
The white December,
The dim-lit chamber,
The hearth's dull beams:
At which I found you,
With perfume round you,
Low singing to the fire's faint gleams!
'Twas then that first I kissed your tresses,
And you confessed amid caresses —
It was the Christmas of your dreams.

Now, red Septembers
And gray Novembers
And white Decembers,
With joy and pain,
Have twined around us
So oft, and found us
In pain and pleasure one, — though twain,
That now my memory findeth trouble
To think just when, O sweetest double,
Love in our hearts began his reign.

THE NATIONALIST PIONEERS.

[May 1, 1889.]

Not heralded with thunder of dull drums,
Or cannon booming round the echoey hills,
Not armed with swords, but thoughts, our army comes;
Yet through its ranks a grander music thrills
Than ever cheered the charge on fiery field
Where man for man has offered up his life:
We know how long and strong may be the strife,
But Right fights with us and we dare not yield:
Else, having seen the light and heard the song
Of that most holy hill, the prophets' place,
If we should falter 'gainst the present wrong,
How could we look our brothers in the face?

IN MEMORIAM OF BOYLE O'REILLY AND BERNARD CARPENTER.

[Read at Papyrus Club Dinner, Oct. 4, 1890.]

By empty chairs shall we the glass invert,
After the mode approved in Omar's song,
When those whose wit once made the true dessert
Are sadly absent from the festal throng?

By empty chairs shall we the glass turn down?
Nay, friends, what need of symbols to express
Our deep regret and their most high renown
Whose lives made pleasure more and sorrow less?

The kindly smile that welcomed ere it came
Another's jest and brightly sped it on —
The ready grasp, warm with the heart's fine flame —
The tuneful tongue — are they forever gone?

Is the great Soul, with wide affections crowned,
Merely a chemic vapor, as they say
Who think that Mind is but a higher round
On Matter's ladder, sure to wear away?

Nay — such a life as his, who once was chief
Of our high company, would seem designed
To prove, if man needs greater proof than grief,
That over mind is something more than mind.

Was it O'Reilly's genius made his death
So deeply felt in tenement and hall?
Or was it heart which, though unseen like breath,
Like breath is felt at once and felt by all?

No need to answer this in schoolman phrase,
No need to speak. Leaping from every eye,
Though Genius dazzle with prismatic rays,
That Heart is King, comes the supreme reply.

But in our chieftain do we not sometimes,
When well escaped from Trade's delirious din,
Through the sweet saneness of his noble rhymes
Find Heart and Genius proven to be twin?

And he, that other child of Sorrow's Isle,
With wit and learning playing on his lips,
A modern priest for whom the Muse's smile
Kept formal creed in beautiful eclipse:

He, too, went down the dark and lonely path,
Into the valley of the shadow strange,
Inspired — and oh! his inspiration hath
The freshness of tomorrow in its range.

His inner life was like his parting song,
That lyric lovely as a lover's kiss
Burning with love, yet filled with hate of wrong,
The song entitled, "In a World Like This."

Ah! in a world like this how many things
Perplex those natures who perfection seek!
How often want weighs down the poet's wings
And fools make noises, when the Muse would speak!

Therefore, 'twas said "Whom the Gods love die young,
Thus, many deaths escaping;" and in truth
Perhaps 'tis wrong to yearn for songs unsung —
Or wish those back who leave us, crowned with youth.

And yet, when die the noble and the great,
While men of envious tongue and double face
Live on and prosper in this earthly state,
How bitter seems the riddle of the race!

How cruel seems the Sphinx with woman-smile
And tiger-heart propounding day by day
A question dark that haunts us all the while —
A ghostly question which no words can lay!

But yet, my friends, we are not here to-night
To mourn our poets, who, when summer's rose
Was blushing deepest, full of vital light,
Sudden, went silent to their first repose.

For oh, dear friends, the time for grief is passed.
The glorious memory of well-spent years,
E'en as their force all marble can outlast,
Into a rainbow should transmute all tears.

They are not really vanished into naught,
Because we cannot touch them with our hands
We touch them deeper with our hearts: the thought
Unseen the unseen spirit understands.

They are not really vanished, but so bright
Their spirits on our cloudy vision rise
That we are dazzled by excess of light:
The glory of their morning blinds our eyes.

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